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FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2005

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BRIEFING

Ozkok Says He Will Step Down Next Year: Dailies report that General Hilmi Ozkok, chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS), put an end to long-standing speculation that he will seek the presidency after retiring from the military next year. Ozkok said in a statement issued Thursday that he is not considering extending his tour of duty beyond August 2006, and that he will not enter politics following his retirement. Many in the media had speculated that the AKP Government may turn to General Ozkok as a presidential candidate in May 2007, when the term of current president Ahmet Necdet Sezer is due to expire. With regard to Sezer's replacement, opposition parties favor an early election to 'renew' the parliament before the parliament elects a new president. The AKP insists that a new election will not come to the agenda before Sezer's term expires. The next general election must be held no later than November 2007.

More on Barzani Meeting With Turkish Intelligence Chief: "Hurriyet" reports that the meeting between Iraqi Kurdistan Regional President Barzani and Turkish Intelligence Undersecretary Emre Taner last month in Erbil focused mainly on the PKK issue. The paper claims that the two sides discussed measures that could be taken by the Iraqi side to prevent PKK border infiltration into Turkey. They also reviewed PKK activities in northern Iraq, and examined a Turkish proposal to reestablish a number of security stations along the Turkish-Iraqi border. "Hurriyet" columnist Ferai Tinc claims that Taner also offered to establish a free trade area between Turkey, northern Iraq,

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and northern Syria, provided that Iraq's Sunni Arab population participates in larger numbers in the December 15 election and achieves greater representation in the new Iraqi Government. Many other commentators view the meeting as a sign that Turkey is seeking to establish a more positive and 'realistic' relationship with Iraqi Kurdish leaders.

Ambassador Wilson to Arrive in Ankara in December: The new US Ambassador to Turkey, Ross Wilson, will arrive in Ankara on December 3, "Radikal" reported on Thursday. Wilson, who has been granted 'agreement' by the Turkish Government, was approved by the US Senate on November 18 following his nomination by President Bush. Wilson, known for his 'sensitivity' on the PKK issue, is expected to give priority to combating terrorism during his term in Ankara, according to the report.

CIA Plane May Have Flown Over Turkey on November 3: "Sabah" reports on its front page today that a CIA plane allegedly took off from Egypt on November 3 and flew through Turkish airspace without responding to calls by Turkish air traffic controllers to identify itself. Turkish Air Force jets were reportedly sent to intercept the plane. The Turkish jets 'caught up' to the CIA plane near Istanbul, and escorted it as far as the Bulgarian border. On its inside pages, "Sabah" runs a story under the headline "Torture Airlines" recounting numerous reports in the European media concerning alleged transit and overflight of European countries by planes operated by the CIA.

General Buyukanit to Visit US in December: Turkish Land Forces Commander General Yasar Buyukanit will visit the US December 10-14, papers report. Buyukanit will discuss with the Americans the terrorist PKK presence in northern Iraq, the global fight against terrorism, and regional developments. Buyukanit is expected to take over as Chief of General Staff in August 2006.

Turkish Civilian and Military Leaders to Discuss Semdinli Incidents: Top Turkish military and civilian officials are

set to convene on Friday in Ankara to discuss issues related to terrorism and security. The recent blasts in Semdinli, in the southeastern province of Hakkari, and the ensuing civil unrest that claimed six lives will be taken up at the meeting, according to a statement released by the Prime Ministry on Thursday. Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, Justice Minister Cemil Cicek, Interior Minister Abdulkadir Aksu, Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul, Chief of General Staff General Hilmi Ozkok, Land Forces Commander Yasar Buyukanit and Jandarma Commander Fevzi Turkeri will attend the meeting. Justice Minister Cemil Cicek told the press yesterday that a parliamentary investigation into the bombings may not comply with Turkey's constitution. Parliament Speaker Bulent Arinc, however, strongly backed the probe. Meanwhile, Hakkari Governor Erdogan Gurbuz was reassigned by the Government yesterday to a position in Tokat Province. The media interpreted the move as an effort by the Prime Minister to be responsive to the citizens of Hakkari on the Semdinli incident. Many citizens called for the Governor to be removed during the Prime Minister's recent visit to the troubled province.

Kretschmer Backs Investigation into Semdinli Blasts: The European Commission Representative to Turkey, Ambassador Hans Jorg Kretschmer, said that by investigating the Semdinli bombings thoroughly regardless of the identity of the perpetrators, Turkey can show that it is a country that abides by the rule of law. Kretschmer recalled that some

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elements connected to the state may have been implicated in the blasts. Kretschmer noted that he saw Prime Minister Erdogan's recent visits to Diyarbakir and Hakkari as 'very important gestures.' Kretschmer also urged Turkey to be 'less defensive' about the Lausanne Treaty and more flexible in approaching issues related to minorities. He said that Turkey needed to align itself with European standards in the treatment of minorities rather than being tied to the narrow definition established at Lausanne. The Foreign Ministry promptly issued a statement saying that provisions of the Lausanne Treaty 'can never be open to debate.'

Motaki to Visit Ankara Next Week: Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Motaki will make an official visit to Ankara on November 30. The visit will be the first by a senior Iranian official since President Ahmadinejad took office. Motaki will meet with Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Gul. Bilateral ties and regional developments will be discussed during the visit. Ankara is expected to advise Motaki that Tehran must respond positively to the international community's expectations regarding Iran's nuclear program. Iran's former ambassador to Ankara, Motaki was known for making radical statements during his tenure in Turkey. Iranian sources said that during his visit, Motaki will convey a message from Tehran that the Iranian Government wants to strengthen its ties with Turkey.

Turkish Cyprus Drafts Bill to Return Greek Cypriot Assets: Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat drafted a bill that will give Greek Cypriots the right to reclaim property through Turkish Cypriot courts, "Hurriyet" reports. The draft will pave the way for the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to recognize 'TRNC' courts as part of the domestic legal system in Cyprus. If the ECHR accepts the Turkish Cypriot initiative, Greek Cypriots will no longer be allowed to file new lawsuits against Turkey in the European Court, and the existing 1,300 cases will be transferred to 'TRNC.'

Bryza to Visit Nicosia in December: The Independent Greek Cypriot daily "Politis" reported on Friday that US Deputy Assistant Secretary Matt Bryza will visit Nicosia in the first half of December in an effort to sound out both sides in Cyprus on the solution process. Bryza will convey to President Papadopoulos and Turkish Cypriot leader Talat a message from the State Department leadership that any new

initiative on the Cyprus issue must begin on the island rather than abroad. He will stress that the two sides must begin preliminary negotiations to find common ground that will allow the resumption of the process. Within this framework, the United States will seek to arrange a one-on-one meeting between Papadopoulos and Talat in the presence of a UN representative. The Americans believe a meeting between the two leaders would constitute proof that the two communities have the necessary political will to bridge their differences.

Syria Sends Delegation to Turkish Cyprus: Following initiatives by Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkmenistan to end the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots, Syria sent an official delegation to the `TRNC,' "Yeni Safak" reports. The paper sees the shift in Damascus' policies on the Cyprus issue as part of Syrian efforts to seek rapprochement with Turkey.

Gul to Represent Turkey at OIC Mecca Summit: Turkey will be represented by Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul at the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit meeting in Mecca on December 7-8, papers report. President Ahmet

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Necdet Sezer has decided not to attend the meeting, and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan will be on an official visit to Australia and New Zealand during that timeframe.

Two Turkish Hizbullah Members Sentenced to Life Imprisonment: Two members of the Turkish Hizbullah organization were sentenced to life without parole on Thursday, and two others received long prison terms. Revelations concerning a series of assassinations carried out by the Hizbullah militants had shocked Turkey in the late 1990s. Mehmet Emin Aksoy and Sehmuz Aksoy, believed to have been the senior military operatives in the terrorist organization, were sentenced to life in prison for attempting to change Turkey's constitutional order. Two other Hizbullah members, Abdulsamet Yildiz and Sadullah Arpa, were sentenced to seven years and six months each. Six suspects were cleared of charges, while the remaining 26, who were convicted of aiding the terrorist organization but benefited from a `repentance law' for defectors, were set free.

Poll: AKP Would Win a General Election: A new opinion poll conducted by the ANAR company, known to be close to the ruling AK Party, shows support for the AKP running at 45 percent, with the main opposition CHP in second position at 13 percent, "Vatan" reports. All other political parties would fall below the 10 percent threshold for parliamentary representation if an election were held today, according to the survey.

Al-Jazeera Silences Broadcasts Briefly to Protest Bush: Qatar-based al-Jazeera TV silenced its broadcasts for 15 minutes as a symbolic protest on Thursday to urge the US and UK to clarify press reports claiming that President Bush sought to bomb al-Jazeera, Turkish papers report. The protest was held at the al-Jazeera headquarters in Qatar and in its overseas bureaus, including in Turkey. Al-Jazeera noted that the British newspaper "The Daily Mirror" had reported that President Bush told Prime Minister Tony Blair at a White House summit on April 16, 2004 that he wanted to bomb Al-Jazeera's headquarters in Doha. If these allegations are true, al-Jazeera said, it would be a `shocking and distressing event' not only for al-Jazeera, but for the whole media world.

19 PKK Members Arrested in Istanbul: Turkish police arrested 19 suspected PKK terrorists in four separate security operations in Istanbul yesterday, papers report. Anti-Terror units also arrested 2 suspected PKK members charged with the smuggling of handguns. Police seized 34 handguns, 53 cartridges, and 150 bullets in searches of the

homes and offices of the two terrorists.

EDITORIAL OPINION

"Turkish Intelligence Chief Meets Barzani"

Editor-in-Chief Ertugrul Ozkok commented in the mass-appeal "Hurriyet" (11/24): "Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) Undersecretary Emre Taner met with the regional President of Iraqi Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, in northern Iraq last month, four days before Barzani flew to Washington for talks. This meeting indicates changes in Turkish policies with regard to northern Iraq. US may leave Iraq one day, but it will never leave the northern part of the country. If it did, it would be a nightmare scenario for the Kurds -- angry Sunni Arabs on one side, and Turkey, Syria and Iran on the other, besieging the Kurdistan zone from all sides. People in the US will not approve of troops

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rushing to the aid of the Kurds in such a scenario. Turkey must face the reality of the region since March 1, 2003. However, the Kurds also need a sense of realpolitik."

"Turkey's Northern Iraq Vision to be Determined by December 15 Polls in Iraq"

Ferai Tinc observed in the mass-appeal "Hurriyet" (11/25): "Prime Minister Erdogan's chief foreign policy advisor Professor Ahmed Davudoglu said Turkey has been in close contact with all Iraqi groups, including the Shiites. Turkey deems achieving stability in Iraq essential. If December elections are held in a transparent way, and Sunnis are given a chance to be represented at the Iraqi parliament, said Davudoglu, problems in Iraq can be overcome by establishing economic interdependence among Baghdad and its neighbors. On the Hariri assassination probe, Davudoglu said Turkey has been in continuous contact with Damascus and UN in an effort to keep the channels for dialogue open. Ankara opposes imposing long-term economic sanctions on Damascus, and has stressed to the US that such embargoes would not be in line with Turkey's interests. Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki's upcoming visit to Turkey next week is another indication of Turkey's increasing influence in the Middle East."

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